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978-0-521-88167-8 - The Strange Survival of Liberal England: Political Leaders, Moral Values and the Reception of Economic Debate

Edited by E. H. H. Green and D. M. Tanner

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Introduction

Erwen Green and Duncan Tanner

The title of this collection – the strange survival of Liberal England – is an allusion to the title of George Dangerfield's classic polemical text, *The Strange Death of Liberal England*, a study which set the tone for much subsequent and more academic analysis.¹ Dangerfield had argued that British Liberalism was effectively finished as a political creed by 1914. It had proved incapable of addressing the 'modern' problems which Britain faced: industrial unrest, nationalist discord, an upsurge of feminist activism – and ultimately, the irrationalism of war. Much subsequent scholarship accepted that 'moderate' and 'bourgeois' ideologies could not cope with such challenges. From this perspective, the ideas which attracted attention were naturally Marxism and fascism, the ideologies of left and right, in a century dominated by the extremes.² Britain sat on the edge of these developments, the dull (but safe and rather pleasant) cousin of passionate and ideologically charged continental movements. Although British Liberalism had survived longer than its continental European equivalent, Britain's version of these developments was the polarisation of politics around a two-party, Labour–Conservative, paradigm: or so historians argued in the 1960s and 1970s.

There were powerful echoes of this emphasis within political science. Much attention was paid to sophisticated (often continental European) thinkers; the less abstractly theoretical modern British intellectual tradition was often marginalised. This tendency was reinforced by students of political systems, who saw modern Britain as essentially different from continental Europe – wrapped up within its evolving Westminster model, its tradition of democratic progression and cross-class collaboration meant it was less ideological, more pragmatic – more

¹ G. Dangerfield, *The strange death of Liberal England* (1st edn, 1935; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

² For example, E. Hobsbawm, *Age of extremes: The short twentieth century 1914–1991* (London: Michael Joseph, 1994).

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'British'.³ Even those who stressed the significance of Britain's moderate social democracy, and of the British breed of politician/theorist, still felt obliged to compare such writers critically and unfavourably with their European counterparts.⁴ Historians of British Conservatism (and the British Conservative party) fuelled the impression that there was less engagement in Britain between ideas and politics. The Conservative party was proudly unideological, rejecting all (even Conservative) ideologies.⁵ The Conservatives' main rival, others contended, was a sedate Labour party, enmeshed in a 'Labourism' which was devoid of any real socialist content.⁶ Liberalism was hardly worth consideration.

Amongst economists and economic historians, more attention was always paid to economic thinkers – like Keynes – who had an impact on economic practice in advanced democracies. However, if this suggests a difference of political emphasis between students of economic and political ideas, there was nonetheless a similarity of approach. In the same way that students of political theory were interested in 'great men' (men were indeed the subject of most such studies) Keynes was (likewise) a great and abstract thinker, whose ideas merited attention for their contribution to the canon of economic thought. In early biographies, Keynes's ideas were given an exalted status. This veneration was also apparent in some historical works. The Labour party in the 1920s, for example, was denounced as a failure for not adopting Keynesian ideas.⁷ The appropriateness (and existence) of the great man's 'solutions' for the problem of unemployment was taken as read.

This book is a product, firstly, of the interest in Liberal, social democratic and socialist political ideas which developed in opposition to these

³ The classic statements include T. Nairn, 'The English working class', *New Left Review* 24 (1964), 43–57; L. Kolakowski, *Main currents of Marxism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978).

⁴ See, for example, D. Marquand, *Ramsay MacDonald* (London: Cape, 1977), pp. 91–3.

⁵ S. Ball and A. Seldon (eds.), *Conservative century: The Conservative party since 1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); J. Ramsden, *The age of Balfour and Baldwin 1902–40* (London: Longman, 1978), pp. ix–xi.

⁶ For example, J. Saville, 'The ideology of Labourism', in R. Benewick *et al.* (eds.), *Knowledge and belief in politics* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1973). For a summary of this approach and its applications, J. Callaghan, S. Fielding and S. Ludlam (eds.), *Interpreting Labour: Essays on the Labour party and Labour history* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003).

⁷ This classic denunciation can be found in R. Skidelsky, *Politicians and the Slump: The Labour government of 1929–1931* (London: Macmillan, 1967). Early biographies included R. Lekachman, *The age of Keynes: A biographical study* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969); R. H. F. Harrod, *The life of John Maynard Keynes* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972); D. E. Moggridge, *John Maynard Keynes* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976). The definitive biographical study is now the massive three-volume study by Robert Skidelsky: *John Maynard Keynes: A biography* (London: Macmillan, 1983, 1993, 2000).

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trends; and, secondly, of scholarship which addresses the connection between these 'moderate' political and economic ideas and public policy and debate. This introduction argues that substantial and positive developments occurred from the 1970s onwards, both through empirical revisionism and from conceptual innovations which originated within the history of ideas and the analysis of economic policy and practice. The essays themselves are testimony to the capacity of intellectual and economic history to generate new ideas from within, to absorb ideas from other and more theoretical bodies of scholarship, to question some emphases and omissions within these works – and to add substantially to the quality of scholarship. Such shifts have attracted comparatively little attention from those concerned with postmodern theories and their impact, with the means by which history is produced, rather than the produce of historians. One aim of the volume is thus to challenge this neglect by focusing on and illustrating the relationship between ideas, human agency and politics in work by a series of scholars with varied but broadly related interests.

I

In the early 1970s, scholars started to challenge the marginalisation of research on Britain's moderate political tradition. A number of Anglo-American scholars emphasised the vibrancy of Edwardian Britain's radical Liberal culture.⁸ Labour's more intellectually sophisticated social democratic thinkers were also studied, although – like some of its leading thinker/politicians – largely as the intellectual progenitors of a 'distinctively' British social democratic tradition.⁹ However, perhaps the most significant development was an emphasis on the continuing intellectual significance of two Liberal thinkers. Scholars argued that Liberalism was less bourgeois, less irrelevant, less marginal than Dangerfield (and others) had assumed. Indeed, by the late 1970s, the New Liberal thinkers L. T. Hobhouse and J. A. Hobson were being portrayed as progressive – indeed social democratic – thinkers who had developed Liberalism as a radical creed.¹⁰ Moreover, as thinker/activists whose ideas permeated

⁸ See, for example, M. J. Wiener, *Between two worlds: The political thought of Graham Wallas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971); A. J. A. Morris (ed.), *Edwardian Radicalism 1900–14* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974).

⁹ J. Winter, *Socialism and the challenge of war: Ideas and politics in Britain, 1912–1918* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974); L. P. Carpenter, *G. D. H. Cole: An intellectual biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973); A. W. Wright, *G. D. H. Cole and socialist democracy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979).

¹⁰ P. F. Clarke, *Liberals and Social Democrats* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978); S. Collini, *Liberalism and sociology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); M. Freeden, *The New Liberalism: An ideology of social reform* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978).

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politics and reached a wider audience, they had a substantial and broader impact.

In Peter Clarke's work, ideas became popular within an organisation when they satisfied political needs (especially if they were wrapped in the cloak of party principle and hence 'legitimised' in the process). This was notably the case with Hobhouse's most famous book, *Liberalism* (1911), and with Hobson's *The Crisis of Liberalism* (1909).¹¹ The 'social purchase' of an idea – its capacity to articulate and mobilise popular interests – also determined the extent of its appeal to the electorate. Others – notably Michael Freedman – also abandoned a narrow focus on ideas, but approached the subject rather differently. Freedman examined the popularity of an idea by looking at the extent to which it permeated a broader intellectual culture.¹² Some works on economic ideas also escaped from a simple interest in the quality of a theory, stressing the *impact* of thinkers like Keynes rather than the value of his ideas as theory.¹³

This approach paralleled a changing climate within the history of ideas, particularly within Cambridge. In 1969 Quentin Skinner had famously argued that it was important to look at a theorist's intention and aims, to appreciate that political and other values influenced their arguments, either directly or indirectly.¹⁴ Neither Clarke nor Collini was a 'Skinnerite'; indeed, whilst both made reference to Skinner, neither was consciously 'theoretical' in orientation, although neither ignored theory. Indeed, Clarke referred more to Marx's writing on ideology than Skinner's (if only to refute some of his main arguments).¹⁵ Work by

¹¹ For this, see P. F. Clarke, 'Introduction' to J. A. Hobson, *The Crisis of Liberalism* (1st edn 1909; Brighton: Harvester Press, 1974).

¹² See Freedman, *The New Liberalism*. For a fuller account of Freedman's step away from the 'traditional apostolic succession of the "great thinkers"', and for his subsequent conceptual innovations, see his *Liberal Languages: Ideological imaginations and twentieth century progressive thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), pp. 8–9.

¹³ See, for example, D. Winch, *Economics and policy: A historical study* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1969); S. Howson and D. Winch, *The Economic Advisory Council, 1930–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); J. M. Buchanan and R. E. Wagner, *Democracy in deficit: The political legacy of Lord Keynes* (New York: Academic Press, 1977).

¹⁴ Q. Skinner, 'Meaning and understanding in the history of ideas', *History and Theory* 8 (1969). See also Q. Skinner, 'The principles and practice of opposition: the case of Bolingbroke vs Walpole', in N. McKendrick (ed.), *Historical perspectives: Studies in English thought and society in honour of J. H. Plumb* (London: Europa, 1974). This has closer affinities with some of the work discussed here, notably in its discussion of the context of refutation.

¹⁵ For Clarke's (hardly prominent) comments on Skinner, see Clarke, *Liberals and Social Democrats*, esp. p. 291. Collini recognised but declined to elaborate on this (partial) debt – but added robustly sensible comments on the problems of trying to appreciate intent on the basis of a literal understanding of the text. See Collini, *Liberalism and sociology*, pp. 7–10.

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J. G. A. Pocock was also part of this context.¹⁶ It was particularly influential on a rather different group of largely nineteenth-century historians, who started to examine the ways in which moral and religious values helped form or refract 'secular' economic and political notions.¹⁷ Linked to the philosophical Conservatism of Peterhouse, the focus of this research nonetheless shifted away from Maurice Cowling's apparent concern with the machinations of high politics to the principles of high Anglicans. This latter (and rather loose) collection of academics is often seen as a group apart; but relations between those concerned with (respectively) radical and Conservative ideas and their political impact were never as strained as those between social historians and 'Peterhouse' scholars. True, some historians of religion identified a hostility to their subject stemming from the 'left-liberal sentiment and commitment which characterised western universities from the 1960s' – and found a 'Whig', 'Marxist' or 'Fabian' scholar lurking around every academic corner. But it was not historians of twentieth-century radical ideas who rushed to register their disquiet with this wide-ranging attack.¹⁸ Nonetheless, the thrust of those writing on the resolutely secular Hobson and Hobhouse was different from those analysing the impact of religious ideas on economics and politics. Many late-Victorian and Edwardian radicals had felt that religion was often an excuse for seeing 'moral regeneration', not state intervention, as the means of addressing social needs. Those who studied their ideas paid little attention to the religious moralism which motivated some New Liberal sympathisers; for many years there were comparable gaps in the study of Edwardian socialism.

Naturally, not all Edwardian political history focused on the context in which Liberal ideas were shaped. Much work on Liberal ideology from within the history of ideas focused less on the New Liberals' role as thinker/activists and more on their role as thinkers who deserved a place in the canon of political thought.¹⁹ Some scholars took this further,

¹⁶ The most frequently cited work being J. G. A. Pocock, *Politics, language and time: Essays on political thought and history* (London: Methuen, 1972).

¹⁷ As in the works of Boyd Hilton, J. P. Parry, Richard Brent and others. For the influence of Pocock, see, for example, the summary in J. Lawrence, 'Political history', in S. Berger et al. (eds.), *Writing history: Theory and practice* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2003). For a more nuanced account of one area where Pocock's work was influential, R. Brent, 'Butterfield's Tories: "High Politics" and the writing of British political history', *HJ* 30 (1987), 943–54.

¹⁸ J. C. D. Clark, *English society 1688–1832: Ideology, social structure and political practice during the ancient regime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), e.g. pp. 1–2, 10–12, 88, 95. Nonetheless, there was something behind the polemic, in that cultural values embedded in elite circles have often permeated popular historical writing. For example, see Collini below, pp. 251–74.

¹⁹ In addition to works cited at note 10 above, see M. Freeden, *J. A. Hobson: A reader* (London, Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1988); M. Freeden, *Reappraising J. A. Hobson:*

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arguing that the 'Liberal' principles which they redefined had an enduring relevance, surviving beyond the party's Edwardian heyday by permeating social democratic thought. Harold Laski and G. D. H. Cole's interest in explaining the limits of state centralism was thus seen as evidence of abiding and 'Liberal' philosophical influences, which were being absorbed into socialist thought.²⁰ Ramsay MacDonald's 'Liberal' social democracy was said to stem from a philosophical Idealism absorbed from Liberal traditions.²¹ Economic historians also found evidence of the survival of Liberalism, as Keynesian ideas were apparently absorbed into Labour policy analysis both in the 1930s and thereafter.²² Such works did not really look at what 'Liberal' ideas meant to those who used them.

Political historians who were more sceptical about ideas as agents of change – and there were many of them – maintained a rather different approach to that developed by intellectual historians like Clarke and Collini (or for that matter, Parry and Boyd Hilton). They argued that it was not so much *ideas* as *people* who determined political actions – hence it was Liberal people, not Liberal ideas, who were responsible for the longevity of Liberal policies. The inter-war Labour party became a vehicle for progressive ideals, it was suggested, because Edwardian Liberals like Norman Angell, H. N. Brailsford and others found a place within its ranks.²³ Historians of the Conservative party were if anything even more cautious about suggesting that Liberal ideas permeated Conservative politics, not least because they minimised the role of ideas in politics generally. But several noted the positive role of Liberal defectors within the Conservative party. In Conservative history (before Thatcher) it was often the 'Liberal Tories' (or the Liberal Unionists or National Liberals) who were seen as the better party leaders, largely because of their capacity to address a broader (non-Conservative) audience.²⁴

Humanism and welfare (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990); J. Allett, *New Liberalism: The political economy of J. A. Hobson* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981); J. Townshend, *J. A. Hobson* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991); J. Phelby (ed.), *J. A. Hobson after fifty years* (London: Palgrave, 1994); J. Meadowcroft (ed.), *Liberalism and other writings: L. T. Hobhouse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

²⁰ M. Freedon, *Liberalism divided: A study in British political thought 1914–39* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

²¹ J. Meadowcroft, *Conceptualizing the state: Innovation and dispute in British political thought 1880–1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

²² E. Durbin, *New Jerusalem: The Labour party and the economics of democratic socialism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985).

²³ D. Blaazer, *The Popular Front and the progressive tradition: Socialists, liberals and the quest for unity, 1884–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

²⁴ See, for example, P. Marsh, *The discipline of popular government: Lord Salisbury's domestic statecraft* (Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1978), pp. 119–41. The much-praised Liberal Tories included Baldwin, R. A. Butler and Harold Macmillan. For an account which places more emphasis on the diffusion and plasticity of ideas, see M. Bentley, 'Liberal Toryism in the twentieth century', *TRHS*, 6th series, 4 (1994), 177–202.

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In part because of this spread of 'Liberal' influences, what seemed striking to many historians was not the power of the political extremes, nor competition between competing sets of party ideologies, but the strength of an economic and social policy consensus which crossed party lines and dominated much of the twentieth century. Initially, and with some notable exceptions, this 'consensus' was not regarded as an 'achievement'.²⁵ For many historians of the early Labour party, its party's main leaders, Ramsay MacDonald and Philip Snowden, were guilty of betrayal – through their love affair with the New Liberalism before 1914 and their enthusiasm for classical liberal economics in the 1920s.²⁶ The 'Establishment's' commitment to economic orthodoxy permeated government circles' including the Civil Service. The 'Treasury view' as it became known amongst economic historians had more impact on policy than different party ideologies. If war created a new consensus, based around Keynesian ideas and the social policies of William Beveridge, another Edwardian Liberal, it was because these ideas represented and offered 'practical' achievements – full employment and the Welfare State – and not because 'ideas' were somehow driving forces in constructing a debate or creating a political agenda.²⁷

It was in this, rather unquestioning, way that 'Liberal' ideas were said to have permeated the post-war world.²⁸ Similarly economists who did not look in archives argued that the 1950s was a 'Keynesian era', in which governments (across Europe and further afield) were converted to a Keynesian perspective. Positive references to Keynes and Beveridge amongst politicians were often taken at face value. The 'scientific' value of their economic and social doctrines made them unquestionable. In other instances, however, there was also recognition of popular support for the fruits of the post-war settlement. It was argued that the terms of the policy debate were constrained not just by the nature of post-war economic growth and by the relative strength of the ideas behind 'consensus', but by public demand. There was a relatively narrow intellectual and political space in which politicians could operate compared to other periods.²⁹ It took a strident Conservatism – and its strident representative, Margaret Thatcher – to finally put 'Conservative' Keynesianism to

²⁵ B. Harrison, 'The centrist theme in modern British politics', in B. Harrison (ed.), *Peaceable kingdom: Stability and change in modern Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982).

²⁶ For a more nuanced view, see J. Harris, 'Labour's social and political thought', in D. Tanner et al. (eds.), *Labour's first century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), esp. pp. 11–19.

²⁷ P. Addison, *The road to 1945: British politics and the Second World War* (London: Cape, 1975).

²⁸ See, for example, D. Kavanagh and P. Morris, *Consensus politics from Attlee to Thatcher* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989).

²⁹ We owe this point to James Thompson.

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rest in the 1970s. Labour's parallel 'rediscovery' of socialism, as articulated in the Alternative Economic Strategy of the early 1980s and the politics of Tony Benn, meant that Keynesian ideas were finally beaten to their corner across the political spectrum.³⁰ However, a consensus was restored when New Labour accepted the principles of 'Thatcherite' economic policy, returning British politics to the pragmatic consensus model which some see as a 'normal' feature of the country's political life.³¹

The challenge to this idea of a cross-party consensus came from several sources, perhaps most significantly from the ordinary process of historical revisionism. New and more evidently archival scholarship – often based around government papers in the Public Records Office – suggested that economic experts within the Civil Service were not easily won over to the 'Keynesian' cause. In the 1930s the Keynesian revolution was strictly skin-deep.³² During the war, the apparent heyday of cross-party agreement, the 'consensus' was more apparent than real.³³ There was limited enthusiasm even by the 1950s.³⁴ Revisionism sprang from other sources as well. The success of Thatcherite Conservatism encouraged people to question whether the success of 'the left' (and of those who advocated state intervention) was quite as predetermined as people once seemed to think.³⁵ The growing salience of monetarist economics in the 1980s encouraged a fresh look at the economic policies of the past. It also produced work which questioned the value of Keynesian economics as a simple explanation of economic performance, and which started to suggest that perhaps 'Keynesian economics' had been less widely accepted than one might have thought.³⁶

³⁰ For this, see, for example, M. Wickham-Jones, *Economic strategy and the Labour party* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996).

³¹ R. Heffernan, *New Labour and Thatcherism: Political change in Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), chap. 8.

³² J. Tomlinson, 'A "Keynesian revolution" in economic policy making?', *EcHR* 37 (1984), 258–65; N. Rollings, 'British budgetary policy 1945–1954: a "Keynesian revolution"?', *EcHR* 41 (1988), 283–98. See also R. Middleton, 'Economists and economic growth in Britain', in L. Black and H. Pemberton (eds.), *Affluent Britain: Britain's post-war 'golden age' revisited* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004).

³³ The substantial older literature on this (and on the post-war period) is summarised in, for example, H. Jones and M. Kandiah (eds.), *The myth of consensus: New views on British history, 1945–64* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996).

³⁴ A. Booth, 'Britain in the 1950s: a "Keynesian" managed economy?', *History of Political Economy* 33 (2001), 283–313; N. Rollings, 'Poor Mr Butskell: a short life wrecked by schizophrenia', *TCBH* 5 (1994), 183–205.

³⁵ These developments encouraged some scholars (including the editors) to question the primacy of class in pushing the Labour party to the fore and to recognise that periods of 'popular' Conservative success were historically quite common.

³⁶ Studies include S. Howson, *British monetary policy 1945–51* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993). Monetarist ideas were applied more directly and critically to interpretations of British economic problems between the wars.

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Political historians also helped undermine the idea of a cross-party economic consensus (or a shared and pragmatic search for the middle ground). They showed that in the 1950s, discontent with the 'consensus' festered beneath the skin of the Conservative party.³⁷ Putting ideas back into the history of Labour's economic policy had already created an awareness of the party's reoccurring interests and emphases, which included doubts about the policy assumptions which underpinned the 'consensus', especially on the left.³⁸ Other work showed that the political parties' policies on taxation,³⁹ economic planning⁴⁰ and consumerism differed even when they used a similar language.⁴¹ Within the Labour party, Keynesian ideas were always less attractive than various versions of state control, often linked (from the 1930s through to the 1960s) with enthusiasm for some form of economic planning.⁴² There were substantial divisions between the political parties on both economic aims and social ideals, even when the rhetoric of politics suggested a search for the centre ground. Political and economic history produced arguments in favour of historical revisionism without recourse to any particularly 'new' and heavily theoretical approaches.

Nonetheless, a fresh emphasis on the role of ideas in politics had an equally potent and conceptually more original influence. The idea of an Edwardian 'consensus' over free trade was challenged by scholars who

³⁷ E. H. H. Green, *Ideologies of Conservatism: Conservative political ideas in the twentieth century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 222–7. See also R. Lowe, 'Resignation at the Treasury: the Social Services Committee and the failure to reform the Welfare State', *Journal of Social Policy* 18 (1989), 505–26, and J. Tomlinson, 'An unfortunate alliance: Keynesianism and the Conservatives, 1945–1964', in A. J. Cottrell and M. S. Lawlor (eds.), *New Perspectives on Keynes* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995).

³⁸ See, for example, N. Thompson, *Political economy and the Labour party: The economics of democratic socialism, 1884–1995* (London: UCL Press, 1996).

³⁹ R. Whiting, *The Labour party and taxation: Party identity and political purpose in twentieth-century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); M. Daunton, *Trusting Leviathan: The politics of taxation in Britain, 1799–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); M. Daunton, *Just taxes: The politics of taxation in Britain, 1914–1979* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

⁴⁰ D. Ritschel, *The politics of planning: The debate on economic planning in Britain in the 1930s* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

⁴¹ M. Hilton, *Consumerism in twentieth-century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); F. Trentmann (ed.), *The making of the consumer: Knowledge, power and identity in the modern world* (Oxford: Berg, 2006); M. Daunton and M. Hilton (eds.), *The politics of consumption: Material culture and citizenship in Europe and America* (Oxford: Berg, 2001).

⁴² R. Toye, *The Labour party and the planned economy, 1931–1951* (Woodbridge: Royal Historical Society, Boydell Press, 2003); J. Tomlinson, *Democratic socialism and economic policy: The Attlee years* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); J. Tomlinson, *The Labour governments 1964–70*, vol. III: *Economic policy* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004).

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stressed the Conservatives' *ideological* support for tariffs.⁴³ This support continued into the 1920s, when free trade was supposed to be an unassailable feature of the consensus. Labour's version of free-trade economics, its own take on the nature of liberty, meant it saw the world differently from Liberals even when using the same policy instruments and ideas. Moreover, at some point in their history, 'Liberal' or 'Keynesian' concepts became absorbed into a 'Labour' or 'Conservative' culture, and developed a different meaning. The scholars who developed this approach further were often not 'political historians', but historians of ideas with a keener interest in the historical context – and in theory.⁴⁴ Indeed, even those who still focused on 'great men' and on a thinker's place within an ideological tradition recognised that there was much cross-fertilisation within contemporary intellectual debate – between socialists, progressives and pluralists and between and across national boundaries.⁴⁵ This form of revisionism was matched by the work of more archivally focused scholars, who were similarly concerned to show that ideas 'mattered' and were influential in determining party trajectories.⁴⁶

Works building on these roots sometimes became more consciously theoretical, challenging the way that political history was written and reconceptualising the dynamics of political change. At times, they reached into areas where poststructuralists had seemed reluctant to tread. Some suggested a role for civil society in determining the agenda of politics, including its economic assumptions. Social movements, they argued, developed ideas on political economy which were less detached from the state and economy, less located in a private world, than Habermassian theory and some empirical research would suggest.⁴⁷ Others saw political

⁴³ See especially E. H. H. Green, *The crisis of Conservatism* (London: Routledge, 1995).

⁴⁴ F. Trentmann, 'The strange death of free trade: the erosion of "Liberal consensus" in Great Britain, c.1903–32', in E. F. Biagini (ed.), *Citizenship and community: Liberals, radicals and collective identities in the British Isles, 1865–1931* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); F. Trentmann, 'Wealth versus welfare: the British left between free trade and national political economy before the First World War', *Historical Research* 70 (1997), 70–98. See also M. Bevir, 'The Marxism of George Bernard Shaw 1883–1889', *History of Political Thought* 13 (1993), 299–318; M. Bevir, 'Fabianism, permeation and Independent Labour', *HJ* 39 (1996); M. Bevir, 'Sidney Webb: Utilitarianism, positivism and social democracy', *Journal of Modern History* 72 (2002), 217–52.

⁴⁵ See, for example, C. Laborde, *Pluralist thought and the state in Britain and France, 1900–25* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000) and M. Stears, *Progressives, pluralists and the problems of the State: Ideologies of reform in the United States and Britain, 1909–1926* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁴⁶ D. M. Tanner, 'The development of British socialism, 1900–1918', in E. H. H. Green (ed.), *An age of transition: British politics 1880–1914* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997); E. F. Biagini and A. J. Reid (eds.), *Currents of radicalism: Popular radicalism, organised labour and party politics in Britain 1850–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

⁴⁷ F. Trentmann, 'Introduction', in F. Trentmann (ed.), *Paradoxes of civil society: New perspectives on modern German and British history* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2000), pp. 24–31.